

Book Review

The ethnographic analyses of “Zulu Woman”: A book review

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Received 15 July, 2015; Accepted 8 August, 2015

This book review brings once more to the spot light the work of Rebecca Hourwich Reyher, American feminist, the Zulu Women about which not too many before this work has dealt with. The book by a woman which have no similitude with the Zulu women of South Africa except her feminist zealotry for women emancipation and her sex divulging in a field of study not of her professional commitment gives us one vital piece of contribution to the understanding of the lived experience and the overall life the Zulu women in the social reality the Zulu world. However, evaluated as ethnographic work, for it at last intentionally or unintentionally belongs to such a genre, it has severed methodological and theoretical parts that account to lack of observance to the ethical and epistemological assumptions of the field of study. This has been identified by many among ethnographic work reviewers before as much as the additions this work claims to have done to the body of knowledge. The review was carried out at both subjective (persona and identity of the author as well as the unique setting of the Zulu women) and objective (criteria for validity of representation in ethnographic study) levels addressing from the very personal up to utterly impersonal considerations of state and society. The leading theoretical assumptions in ethnographic research have guided the review process. In so doing, interpretations approach with descriptive and analytical document analyses of primary (the book) and secondary sources are used. Central of this paper’s critical review is that the author has tried to represent the wider and complex life of the Zulu Women which cannot be simply reduced to one dimensional narrative in to very narrow baggage of a single woman’s hardly representative life history informed by biased western value laden assumptions, ill designed methods of inquiring and rhetorical representation (nature and structure of language used); hence, without prejudice to its positive contribution, it has faulty elements of methods of inquiry, representation and theoretical assumptions that rendered the work a case of misrepresentation though not total non-representation. Thus, it reiterates the imperative for observance of the validity of every step ahead in ethnographic inquiry for rendering a society properly represented as might it bear trans-generational appeal and relevance as the epics stories the world over.

Key words: Ethnographic work, Zulu women, apartheid, polygamy, Zulu marriage and Reyher.

INTRODUCTION

If they have to tell my story, let them say I walked with giants; men rise and fall like the winter winds, but these

names will never die. Let them say I lived in the time of Hector! Let them say I lived in the time of Achilles.

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- *Agamemnon in Troy* (Petersen, 2004)

Alexander in a short life, but without doubt, he achieved mythical aura of his ancestors, Achilles and more. His sacrifice was nearly death but in keeping to his side of the bargain I cannot help but feel he conquered People always want to know how the Legendary Hero of all time, Alexander the great died; but I tell them how he lived.

Ptolemy's Final Speech in Alexander the Great (Stone, 2004)¹

Life-history helps to understand how people interpret social reality by using methods that allow researchers to see the world through their eyes. Life –histories, therefore, place great importance on the person's own interpretations and explanations of their behavior and such as, provide ethnographers with very personal richly descriptive narratives which give us great insight in to every day social life across time.

(Payne, J. and Payne, G., 2004 , p. 23).

The intention of life history methods is normally to explore "what happens" according to the eye witness, but also to discover 'the inner experience of individuals, how they interpret, understand and define the world around them'.

(Faraday, A. and Plummer, K. , 1979, p. 776)

Rationale of the paper

This paper deals with the ethnographic analysis of "Zulu Woman" an ethnographic novel authored by Rebecca Hourwich Reyher, American feminist. The book represents the marriage life of the Zulu royal women through the narration of the protagonist Christina Sibiya's marriage life. As an ethnographic novel, the book review is to take objective and subjective criteria. On the one hand, the characteristic features that constitute the ethnographic genre that lends objectivity to the task of review; on the other hand, as the representation of women, the voiceless and whose lived experience is most often invisible (Declich, 2001) carries gendered peculiarity as well as spatio-temporal subjectivity; add to this the nature of art (obviously personal) used in the representation of the story. Accordingly, the paper stands for this attempt to look in to 'Zulu Women' in line with these objective and subjective parameters, in addition to the aim of the writer. Thus, the paper gives emphasis to

¹The above two epigraphs may be considered irrelevant for African reality for they are from ancient western civilization; however, in taking as part of this paper their relevance is noted on two counts; first, that these stories are no longer considered in water tight Civilizational decided; are part of universal culture which have their own versions in every human society; second, epic stories are not alien to the land of Shaka Zulu, perhaps a close case of similar from the near past to the ancient epic stories. The gender Varsity may be genuine concern to ponder; yet, the aspect of the epic put for the utility of this review is the aspect of representation to be proper and lasting. This concern is even more valid to women stories than men given the often voiceless subaltern status of the former.

several points of discussion: biography of the author, brief summary of the book, methods used in organizing the work, style of representation and criticism on the book which is of both personal and professional.

The epigraphs from films of the ancient Greek are here to remind the reader of the powerful role of artistic narratives in making trans-generational representation of legendary heroes as remotely sited in history as Achilles and Alexander the great to current and generations to come. Similarly, the epic nature of the characters and its being history of violence notwithstanding, the current ethnographic novel is partly considered as how much the author has approximated the lived experience of Zulu women in fictional narrative; that is, how Zulu women will be imagined in posterity.

Author's Design of Inquiry

In trying to organize and write this book, Rebecca Reyher had raised the following different but inter related questions she assumed would get near to answers in the utility of representing the lived experiences of Zulu women in its entirety against the big picture of Zulu social reality. In this regard the questions she raised include (Reyher, 1948, p. xii):

1. What did Zulu women do?
2. How did they manage lifelong marriage?
3. Were they happy?
4. Was polygamy a natural state of man?
5. Was it possible to love with one's body freshly and easily, capturing the spirit and taming it to its primary needs?
6. Were the heart and soul of the "primitive" woman different from the modern woman?

Throughout the book it looks that the writer directly or indirectly tries to navigate for responses probing questions and it is possible to say that the author used them as springboards from which she tries to show how the living styles and conditions of Zulu women looked like by then.

Biography of the author

Rebecca Reyher was born in 1897 in New York from a white family. She went to University of Chicago and earned B.A. degree in 1918; she also studied at the New York School of Social Work between 1920 and 1921. In 1915, she became a suffragette, a female activist in the first half of twentieth century who worked a lot to envisage ways by which women would have equal rights with men especially in relation to political elections (<http://Bancroft.berkeley.edu/Roho/projects/suffragist/>). The role, as a result, she began to play in such feminist movement was best evidenced when she became president of Chicago University Women's Peace Society.

In 1917 she got married to Ferdinand Reyher, a writer, but got divorced in 1933. From this wedlock she had a daughter. She died in 1987 at the age of 89. In general she was a famous feminist veteran suffragette, author and lecturer. The feminist outlook Reyher had developed for she could best be exemplified by the publications she had produced. Especially "Zulu Woman" (1948), "The Fon and His Hundred Wives" (1952) and "Search and Struggle for Equality and Independence" (1977) are some of her major works (Ibid).

A gimps Look at the Zulu

Rebecca, in this book, studied one of the life aspects of the Zulu ethnic group of South Africa. The Zulu are especially widely known for the fierce and tenacious struggle they had put up against the British colonial ambitions particularly under their famous king *Shaka*. It was, however, during the time of the unofficial King Solomon Dinuzulu that through the works of missionaries and other western institutions that the final political and military vestiges of the Zulu resistance to European power were liquidated (Reyher, 1948, p. ix). The Zulu constitute the dominant black peoples of South Africa. The book tries to deal with the patriarchal based polygamous marriage institution and the huge toll it had on the Zulu women through the personal stories of Christina Sibiya who was the first lady of King Solomon Dinuzulu.

Theoretical background

The theoretical background of any author hugely puts a mark on how s/he writes an ethnographic work. Regarding this Signe Howell argues that:

Ethnographic texts are ...created at the interface between the ethnographer as a personality and intellectual being, the people studied and interacted with, and the texts of previous ethnographers and theoreticians. We (ethnographers) have a duty to record as accurately as we (they) can observe events, actions, utterances (Howell, 1997, p. 111).

The first half of twentieth century in Europe (especially Britain) and USA was the period by which several women became actively involved in working to get the right of women to vote in political elections. It was, in short, a period of suffragettes. Since 1915 Rebecca Hourwich Reyher had thus become involved in such feminist oriented movements aspiring political equality for women. She even headed the New York office of National women's party in 1919. This shows that theoretically Reyher was a feminist who in her own ways worked a lot to redress the then existing political, economic, social and even cultural inequalities between men and women, and

for women emancipation from all forces of oppression that be. In general, George Ritzer (Ritzer and Goodman, 2003 , p. 317; Nugent, 1997) has put it as "...feminism is a new scholarship on women that implicitly or formally presents a generalized, wide-ranging system of ideas about the world from a women-centered perspective." And Rebecca Hourwich Reyher was not an exception to this.

Therefore, the dual influence of the feminist emancipator orientation of the author (as a woman and feminist activist) and the professional commitment of an ethnographic novelist to render the subject genuine representation are taken note of in analyzing the novel. In particular, the aspect of sacrificing one for the other or the art of striking fragile balancing, which could be as painstakingly difficult as walking on the sharp edge of a knife, between the two is one point of focus rooted in the subjective elements of the analyses.

Thus, unlike those category of literary critics avowing to text-centric interpretation represented in their famous cliché 'the author is dead', in this case even though the author is as good dead as Socrates her identity and persona is to be repeatedly resurrected to give witness to the nature of her work. Accordingly, the textual content analysis dealt with below is carried out in this spirit.

CONTENT OF THE BOOK

Narrative Representation of the Book

The book is structured in such a way that the author narrates what Christina Sibiya told her as her story and when necessary the author would try to corroborate the story with her personal observation and the documents she got from white South African government officials, missionaries and intellectual experts on "natives". That is, the author does necessarily not show herself up at the beginning or end of each chapter. Rather she keeps narrating the story of her "star" of the book until she would find it necessary to depict her own personal observation and understanding.

Brief summary of the book

Rebecca Hourwich Reyher, before getting involved in the task of organizing and writing this ethnographic novel, was a New York based Magazinit. Before coming to Zulu land of South Africa she ventured on some localities of South America and Asia (Reyher, 1948, p. xi). But it is this work of hers which stood best. In this book Rebecca H. Reyher wanted to show the marriage and life conditions of the Zulu women by presenting the entirely personal lenses through which *Christina Sibiya* looked out up on her life. Reyher tried to show that the story of Christina Sibiya was the story of many Zulu women (Reyher, 1948, p. x). In the Zulu society marriage life was/is instituted based

on a polygamous relation. That is, a man could marry as many women as he wished and could afford as long as he could pay the required *lobola* (bride wealth) (Reyher, 1948, p. 29). The book narrates the marriage life of Christina Sibiya who got wed locked to the unofficial king of the Zulu, Solomon Kwa Dinuzulu. It was in 1934 that Rebecca went to the Zulu land to write something on the lives of Zulu women. She had stayed there for eight months to study what she was after (Reyher, 1948, p. xii). As the title of the book indicates Rebecca wanted to view the lives of the Zulu women from the point of her character-Christina Sibiya.

Christina Sibiya was a daughter of Hezekiah (her father) and Elizabeth (her mother). She was one of the four children in the family. Hezekiah and Elizabeth got married under the supervision of the white missionaries who had made them enter into a commitment not to disrespect their marriage which was contrary to the marriage tradition of the Zulu land. In the Zulu land if a man could pay the necessary *lobola* (bride wealth) he could marry as many wives as he wished. Sibiya's father, however, wanted to detach himself from the commitment he had with his Christian wife Elizabeth. According to the white government's law, this action of Hezekiah would be taken as a crime against the state. But knowing this he left Elizabeth and married two other girls at the same time. Elizabeth was left alone to care for their four children. But thanks to the help rendered to her by the white missionaries, she managed to bring her children up well. She, however, greatly detested the Zulu tradition which allowed a man to marry many girls for she was the direct victim of it. She prayed to God that the same fate wouldn't fall on her girls (Reyher, 1948, pp. 20-).

Sibiya and her brother and sisters were given education in missionary schools separated from the Zulu girls and boys. Especially, Sibiya as the eldest child was supposed to grow in the Zulu way. But her confinement with the missionaries made her alienated from the Zulu traditional life. This made her mother feel happy. Sibiya pursued her education in the mission school and by age of fifteen she became a teacher. Her education, silence, good manner and above all her taste for European way of life began to arouse and captivate the interest of Zulu men living nearby. So men began to talk of a girl of decency and good manner and it spread too many *kraals* (villages in Zulu language). Many men became alerted. Above all men it was the Zulu king *Solomon Dinuzulu* who became fancied with the idea of getting locked in marriage with Sibiya. *Solomon Dinuzulu* (1898-1933) was the king of Zulu land who was famously known for his bravery; he had proved for gallantry against the expansion of European powers to Zulu land, as the Zulu people did so especially under their highly renowned leader, *Shaka Zulu* (Reyher, 1948, p. 26 ff).

Christina Sibiya was, taking lesson from the hardships and life miseries that her mother had come across due to the separation from her husband; in effect. She did not

initially want to get married in the Zulu traditional way. She even prayed not to see such a "bad chance" happen to her. But her prayers seemed to immaterialize when she faced the reality that the king of the Zulu really wanted to marry her. Sibiya was a daughter of a family possible to say with no social status, but Solomon was at the top of the social hierarchy of the Zulu society. Though it was glaringly possible to see huge social gap existing between them, King Solomon made his mind that to marry Sibiya and take her as his first wife. This story seems analogous to peasant fairy tales of the western world that a girl of peasantry origin got glued with a man of rich and distinguished family in wed lock (Reyher, 1948, p. 31 ff).

Though Christina at first loathed the thinking that she could face the same fate as her mother, the idea that the king wanted to marry her was almost impossible to resist. So when Solomon came in person to tell her what his best wishes were she fainted unable to believe what she heard (Reyher, 1948, p. 35). After days Solomon, taking the necessary steps and measures, took her to his *Kraals* as his first wife. Here started the real life of Christina as a woman. In the long marriage with King Solomon she gave birth to four two boys and two girls. But one of the girls died soon (Reyher, 1948, p. 41 ff).

Initially for Sibiya life in Solomon's *Kraal* seemed full of happiness. But this state began to change when the king started to bring one girl after the other from different villages as his wives. The king stated such action as Christina's duty, too. He, at one moment when he brought his second wife, told Christina:

Not only am I marrying this girl, but so are you. . . . We are making her our wife. You and she will be sisters, and will divide between you the work of looking after me. . . . I want you to be good friends as my wives should be. I do not want you to quarrel. If you do I shall punish you. . . . I want you to make her feel at all times she is well come (Reyher, 1948, p. 61).

Solomon took many girls as his wives due to several reasons. Some of the factors for such obsession of Solomon in taking several wives at a time could be best understood by the following sentence:

Solomon honored house by taking a girl from it, for at any time he might raise the status to marriage and bind himself to that house in political alliance. Some of the girls were ambitious, inheriting the political sagacity and shrewdness of their men. They were willing to gamble on the chance they might be mother to a king, and they deliberately set out to captivate the king, in hope that he would marry them (Reyher, 1948, p. 59).

But Christina still held the favored position in his heart. The increasing number of wives, however, made him busy not to continue the kind of intimate relation he had with Christina before. The way he cared for, in times of trouble and holidays, Christina began to resent the other wives who began to entertain the fermentation of jealousy

and feeling of grudge. This greatly disturbed the king as some of them began to openly challenge and disobey the king. Some even committed adultery and tried to flee to where they came from. In other words, the king summoned himself to the task of resolving the feuds which developed among the wives; especially the feeling they had towards Christina was expressed by Solomon in such a way:

I have already told you about Christina, and how I took her, as a child wholly ignorant of the ways of grown-up people. She had been brought up by the missionaries. She did not know how to cut grass, or how to build a hut. You know how natives live; you are accustomed to work. ...I told you when you came here you have to respect and obey her. She has never said anything harmful of you to me nor to anyone in the kraal. Yet I know what you have been gossiping and string up trouble for her. ... I will not have that! ... I shall expect you hereafter to live in peace with Christina, and do nothing that may offend her. ...but if I hear anything further about this, you will be sorry for it (Reyher, 1948, p. 73).

Unable to resist such challenges posed to him by his many wives, Solomon helped by his drunkenness began to trash some of them with sham book. Thrashing was directed to many of his wives whom he thought were disrespectful of his *kraal* laws but Christina. Under the name of official leave the king started to repeatedly flee away from his wives for long. This especially made the king not to give usual special attention he used to give to Christina who was grief stricken by the death of her youngest son. He did not comfort her from her grief. When she asked him why he failed to do so, he seemed reckless. This made Christina ask the loyalty and integrity that her husband had to her and their children. On top of this, just like other girls Solomon began to thrash Christina (Reyher, 1948, p. 97 ff).

Finally lacking the courage to withstand such repeated physical and moral recession, Christina fled away from the King, first to her families and then to Durban where she stayed for three months as a housemaid in a white family home until she was summoned to appear in court to make clear why she abandoned her husband, King Solomon Dinuzulu. In the end, the court decided that Christina had to go the king's *kraal* and be judged in the Zulu way. But the trial took long and in the mean time Solomon died in 1933 and her son Sea price was made heir to the throne and remained on power until 1968 (Reyher, 1948, p. 181 ff).

ANALYSES AND EVALUATION OF THE BOOK

Methodological Construction

Before proceeding to identifying the research methods

that Reyher had employed, it would be better to say thing on the ethnographic research requirements. Signe Howell put it as:

. . . Ethnographers have their own basic requirements of the method stand. These demands are: to interact in the local language; to participate in daily as well as special events; to pay particular attention to the minutiae of social action and interactions, to the institutional, cosmological and materiality of daily and ceremonial life, to the qualities of significant object, to daily and ritual speech, and the dissecting of local categories and indigenous ideas and values; to evaluate cultural representations; to elicit patterns and paradoxes, underlying structuring principles and the forces of normative as well as interpretive significance of instances of breaches and idiosyncrasies (Howell, 1997, p. 115).

Rebecca Reyher, in developing and writing this book, had used the products of her field trips to the study area which took about eight months. In conducting field work she did not come in to touch with many local women. Rather she was focused on having strong and intimate relation with Christina so that she could be able to squeeze out the story of her target woman so as to make the story palatable and convincing. She collected the data for organizing this work by conducting in depth interview with her major character through a translator. In her own words, Reyher put it as:

We established a working procedure. Christina came and talked, slowly, sentence by sentence, while Eric (the white translator) translated. Occasionally we interrupted her to ask a question, but seldom. At first, she was awkward, over-dressed and self conscious . . . then she began to come in every day clothes and . . . the words flowed from her (Reyher, 1948, p. xiii).

There is nothing in the book that the writer was well versed in Zulu language. The interview Reyher had administered with Christina was qualitative and open-ended and it made Sibiyi sometimes, as to saying Reyher, felt free to speak out with little or no shyness. On top of such engaging, qualitative and open-ended interview, Reyher also used some information tapping mechanisms to cross check and augment what Christina had told her with the then existing living realities of the community. Thus she employed personal observation (Reyher, 1948, p. x).

Rebecca Reyher conducted an interview with Christina for a month, but she stayed in the Zulu land for about eight months. During such period of long stay she was able to see for herself the conditions of Zulu women in different life aspects and this had greatly helped her to analyze the information she squeezed out from Christina and develop it in to more convincing story. Likewise, she also consulted documents from the white South African

government offices for “natives”, also works and opinions of white officials of South African government and intellectual experts on “natives” (Reyher, 1948, p. xi).

Moreover, the method of organizing and writing the book Reyher had used can be talked of as inductive for the book tries to depict the life miseries and up-downs an individual female actor of the Zulu society had passed through and how this can be used in developing the bigger picture of the life of the many Zulu women.

Focus of the book

The book focuses on the individual actor of the Zulu-Christina Sibiya. By treating the life story and the womanhood of Sibiya the book attempts to see how polygamy had greatly affected the life of many Zulu women. In other words, as the book tries to depict the life story of a Zulu queen who finally decided to detach from centuries old polygamous tradition of the Zulu society, the narration is mainly based on the deeds and lived experience of a person to portray the condition of women and the treatment they received from their husbands. As has been discussed in the brief summary of the book above, Christina Sibiya had passed through the *ebbs* and *flows* of life. So the author wanted to show this life story of her protagonist as the base by which she would gauge the level of treatment the women of the Zulu received from their husbands. She at the same time also wanted to reassure the world that the life of Christina Sibiya could best exemplify the lives that the Zulu women were forced to face and lead. In many instances as the author in narrating the life of Christina she wanted to use this narration as binocular camera that could help her comprehend and even analyze the life miseries and challenges that the Zulu women were exposed to and how they dealt with them.

Style of representation

The writer dealt with what can be taken as the biography of a single woman and by doing so she tried to see the life of the Zulu woman from the vantage point of the life of Christina Sibiya. That is why the style of representation is individualistic. The book is an ethnographic novel. It tries to give the work an artistic value and so long as Reyher was not a professional ethnographer, she opted to use the mechanism of depicting the story in a novel way. This might have helped the author to come up with a somewhat better description of the story bearing in mind the down side of using novel writing for ethnographic works.

Moreover, the book narrates from third person point of view. As Reyher was not directly involved in the living styles and lives of the Zulu women, what she tells us in the book is assumed to be the point of view of Sibiya. That is in different pages of the book stories are present

in such a way that they are narrated by Sibiya *per se*. But this is not to deny the presence of crafting on the part of the author in re-arranging the stories in line with the questions she raised at the beginning of the work. Every story narrated in the book in one way or another is related to Sibiya so that they are presented from her point of view.

In addition, the tense the author had preferred to use in presenting Sibiya's story was past tense. It was in 1934 A.D. that Rebecca Hourwich Reyher went to South Africa and began to get acquainted with the different socio-economic miseries that they were exposed to. Particularly Reyher arrived in South Africa one year after the death of the unofficial Zulu king, Solomon Dinuzulu (Reyher, 1948, p. xii). Since 1930 rumors were circulating among the Zulu regarding the move away of Christina from her husband in particular and the Zulu polygamous marriage institution in general (Reyher, 1948, p. 191ff). As a result when Reyher came to the region these development of events were fresh in the minds of the Zulu. Thus, Reyher wanted to write something on this story by contacting the owner of the story. But as Reyher did not witness the story in person and since the story had happened before her arrival, she had to use past tense.

The approach in treating the story Reyher used is holistic approach. Holistic approach tries to present a story or an event of an individual actor of a society and then tries to induce, based on it, a story which could be taken as well encompassing and engaging for the whole or some part of the society. That is, though the story directly refers to an individual person or group of individuals, it could be taken as a story which is part and parcel of the life of many peoples in a society.

Accordingly, Reyher narrated the story of the first wife of the unofficial Zulu king, Solomon Dinuzulu, to show that her story was not hers only. It rather was and is still shared by the women of Zulu land in their marriage daily lives. The mental trauma, the psychological depression and the physical and social abuse that Reyher was subjected were taken not as the only problems of marriage life faced by Christina Sibiya. They were also the day to day encounters of the Zulu women. The beatings, sexual negligence, lack of affection from the husband, the society's negative attitude on women were similar experiences of the women of Zulu land (Reyher, 1948, p. 131ff).

Finally, however strong the view of Christina was in narrating the story; the author's voice sometimes is visible to notice. This may be due to the role Reyher had played as a writer in re-arranging and re-structuring the story in line with the information she had collected making use of other mechanisms.

CRITICISM

Ethnographers' Criticism

Though the book, *Zulu woman*, had contributed a lot for

the better understanding of the Zulu society in general and the marriage life of the Zulu women in particular, just like other ethnographic novels it is subjected to criticisms. One of the criticisms the book is exposed to is the idea of “double filtering” (Lowe, 1999, p. 208). Lowe argued that in organizing and writing the book, there exists “deliberate” manipulations both by the author and the story teller. That is, the story’s narration is subjected to selecting and arranging of materials by Christina and by the re-arranging and re-authority of Reyher.

He also argued that, though the book could be taken as a major work that can illuminate something on how the Zulu women led/lead their life, the “deliberate” manipulation of the sources and information by both the author and the story teller makes it difficult to take the book as comprehensive a material as that can depict the fuller picture of the marriage life of the Zulu women (Lowe, 1999, p. 208).

The other point of criticism is the problem of taking Christina’s story as largely told in her own voice for sometimes the narrative voice subsumes Christina’s view point in Reyher’s (Lowe, 1999, p. 207). Most of the time the common problem with ethnographic works, if done on the behalf of a certain market oriented institution, is that for the sake of marketability or commercializing the book authors are tempted to write something based on the trend of the market. As a result authors make their voice sometimes visible in their ethnographic works. Reyher’s work is not an exception to this. Though Reyher (Reyher, 1948, p. 5) claimed that the work is of largely Sibiyi’s voice, it is possible to see her huge influence in developing the story. One of the research methods she used to organize this book is personal observation and tapping of information for some official documents and consultation of experts on “natives”. As a result these helped Rebecca Reyher to put her visible marks on the book.

Moreover, the book is not taken as purely of scientific work. Since Rebecca Hourwich Reyher was not a professional ethnographer or anthropologist, some scientific mechanisms of developing and organizing the book are missing. This makes the work, due to the nature of the narration used is somewhat similar to novels, less scientific (Langness, 1965, p. 14). It is, on the other hand, argued that the style of narration used is so vivid that it can somewhat show the social order of the Zulu in a clear way.

Some critics also hold that sometimes some stories are better told and narrated when they are presented in an ethnographic novel style than when they are put in the style of professionals of a more serious penetration. And Reyher’s work can best exemplify this idea (Woodson, 1948, p. 372). Woodson even went far to suggesting that the aim of the author is to “fathom, if possible, the mind of the African women; in other words, to see the world from her (Christina’s) point of view, and possibly for a moment to think black” (Woodson, 1948, p. 372).

The author also tacitly jumps in to the conclusion that the whole Zulu women were subjected to the “unwanted” practice of polygamy and they suffered a lot from this marriage institution. But to some critics it is difficult to take polygamy, though generally allowed, as widely practiced among the Zulu since it was mainly practiced by the royalty and the well-to-do only. It can also be taken as a social practice which was/is used to gauge the social as well as economic status of a man (Woodson, 1948, p. 372). Since taking a girl as a wife requires a man to pay a *lobola* (bride wealth), it would be difficult for every man of the Zulu land to have any girl he wanted at any time. The *lobola* to be paid to the girl’s father since 1869 was amounted to be 10 heads of cattle was beyond the reach of economically average and below Zulu man. As a result only the well –to-do; and the royalty could afford to have as many wives as they wished since they could pay to the fathers of would be taken wives (Binns, 1975, p. 194).

For Binns, *lobola* is not a harmful cultural practice and it does not happen without the interest of the Zulu women. Zulu women, according to his argument, prefer to be married using the *lobola* tradition for it would help them realize how important they are to their family and to ensure that they are equal to one another. That is, the *lobola* paid for the bride father is taken by the women that they have huge value in the family so that not to lose such family value women may get interested in *lobola* tradition. *Lobola* also serves as a leveler between and among women of different social, political, economic and even physical appearances (Binns, 1975, p. 195).

Personal criticism

This section of the paper deals with the personal criticism I have towards the book. First, the author did not have deep knowledge of the local Zulu language. She conducted intensive interview with the story teller through an interpreter and a guide. This could have obstructed the author to fully grasp every bit of information with minimum problem of understanding. Moreover, the interpreter she used was not from the Zulu. He was a white South African. Judging from the then existing political, socio-cultural and economic lives of South Africa, it would be difficult to regard him as honest to provide the information from the Zulu points of view. Moreover, the interpreter used was a man who might have made Christina Sibiyi felt uneasy particularly when talked with some issues such as sexuality, personal habits, family matters, or questions that may involve reasons for secrecy. Langness argued that there are problems in working with an interpreter (Langness, 1965, p. 37). For example it may appear problematic to talk to a third party about certain areas of human behavior such as sexuality, personal habits, family matters, or questions that may involve reasons for secrecy. The problems even become pronounced if a male interpreter is used to work

with women.

The author also used some words, if seen from a professional point of view, which has negative orientation. The words include: "heathen" (Reyher, 1948, pp. 20, 141), "pagan", "barbarous", "primitive", "savage" and "tribe" (Reyher, 1948, p. 54).

Some of the sentences below show Reyher had used some unnecessary words, if seen from a professional point of view, which could have a derogatory implication.

1. *Living in a home devoid of anything but primitive necessities, where a mother cherished but one hope, to raise her children above the barbarous state of her friends and neighbor...* (Reyher, 1948, p. 26).

2. *At fifteen she was as innocent of the essential mores about her as if she had been a member of a different race. Docile, good-tempered, she was a Christian puritan in a pagan land, a stranger among her own people* (Reyher, 1948, p. 28).

3. *Chaotic and unformed as his dreams of Zulu empire were, he (Solomon's father) was determined that the women whom he would bring to his Kraal to be the mothers of his ever-expanding family, would be Christians, above simple savagery, mud-caked and lice-ridden* (Reyher, 1948, p. 33).

Moreover, the writer repeatedly makes use of the word "native". Though she admitted that she did not understand the negative orientation of the word when she was writing the book, her excuse could not be taken for granted. During the time when she conducted her research in the Zulu land she was able to notice that the white government of South Africa had put in to practice race-based administration policy which had resulted in the implementation of segregating, discriminatory and stigmatizing policies of blacks and whites of the country in their different walks of life. The writer tried to show how this racial discrimination was rife when she was there (Reyher, 1948: p.x). This shows us that the then government of the country used the word "native" not to mean indigenous, as Reyher assumed to be, but to mean peoples who are inferior to the whites of the region in any aspects of life. In general, the word had a derogatory implication.

Deliberately or not the writer in attempting to depict the socio-economic and politico-religious life of the "natives" she might have got blinded by her own culture in understanding the culture of the Zulu especially of the Zulu women. Though Langness argued that it would be difficult for an ethnographer to be completely free of ethnocentrism (Langness, 1965, p. 21; Lengermann and Brantley, 1990), works have to be done in addressing this problem in minimizing the impact of being ethno-centered on the research to be carried so as not to produce a biased study.

Moreover, the writer seemed to be hugely influenced by her theoretical orientation which may have somewhat inhibited her understanding of the realities of her study

group only from the point of women. It would also have been better if the writer were to see the views of male members of the society on such appalling condition of women (Howell, 1997: 110).

The other personal criticism on the work of Reyher is that it would be better if she were to use a comparative research method to see the differences between the polygamous marriage institutions to which the Zulu women were subjected with the concubinage of the western world. Regarding this Signe Howell has clearly put the importance of an act of comparison to an ethnographic work as:

No good ethnography is self-contained. Implicitly or explicitly ethnography is an act of comparison. By virtue of comparison ethnographic description becomes objective. ... it becomes a universal understanding to the extent it brings to bear on the perception of any society the conception of all others (Howell, 1997, p. 4).

Therefore, despite the multiple positive contributions the author's work does have to its name, nonetheless, from the above stated major points of the critical review of other academics and myself it is instructive of taking serious note of the ethical and epistemological considerations of ethnographic research methodology. Personal or group (as in being feminist) experiential emancipator zeal and benign commitment to the same notwithstanding, slacks in this respect do cast unfavorable shadows on the works of enthusiastic and committed persons as the case is with the work of Reyher addressed here.

Perhaps, this work might have lasting effect of its own on how the future generation will understand the Zulu Women or perhaps it might not so be; but the point of vital concern is that the slightest possibility of the former to happen in a long run might have the effect of epic proportion, unless critical reviews like the ones referred above and this work are side by side provided for future generations' scrutiny otherwise.

At last, the whole discussion boils down to what extent the themes raised by the epigraphs at the beginning of the paper, the salient features of both historical (as in the epic stories of Achilles and Alexander the great) and ethnographic representations, the life Zulu Women represented by the narrative of Sibiya's life history? Could it stand for the life of Zulu women as the epics do stand for their periods? Have it approximated the entirety of the lived experience of Zulu Women as an ethnographic work? On account of the reasons detailed herein above, the book is hardly qualified in either of the dimensions.

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